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THE DEATH OF VIOLENCE

Stephen Zanias



Introduction

Following the lead of the United States, the world has taken a stand against terrorism,¹ which plays a role on many different stages around the world. Each stage has its unique set of characters and history; and while the groups may differ in geographic location, ideals, or objectives, they are joined by the fact that they have *terrorized* others to achieve their goals. To many there is no justification for the atrocities they have committed; to others the violence and the reasons for which a terrorist group fights may be acceptable. As the saying goes, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.”

One such group is ETA, an acronym in *Euskara* (the language of the Basques) for “Basque Fatherland and Liberty.” (“Terrorist Group...”) While many feel ETA is an unjustifiable terrorist group, there are those who would argue that this relatively small group of Basque

separatists are legitimately fighting for their rights of freedom and self-determination. Like many terrorist groups, the issue comes down to a matter of perspective, one that involves in-depth analysis of the history and motivations of the parties involved.

However, setting aside the issue of legitimacy, a more pressing question for ETA concerns not its present status, but more importantly its future. In conjunction with issues that will be detailed in this article, the international backlash against terrorism makes ETA’s future appear dismal. In short, ETA appears to be dying. While ETA has been pursuing its separatist agenda for over forty-five years, a large majority of the Basque people are finally taking a stand against the group and its practices. ETA’s reign of terror and power is coming to a close.

However, the separatist movement is moving forward — though with a different approach. Where violence and terrorism failed to accomplish ETA’s objectives, great strides are being made in the political arena. Under the direction of Basque President Juan José Ibarretxe, the Basque Country government has passed several resolutions to provide for

¹In Title 22 of the U.S. Code, Section 2656f(d), the U.S. government has defined terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually to influence an audience.” (“Terrorism...”)

increased Basque autonomy. Drawing on popular support, these efforts have produced some limited dialogue with the Spanish government. While the success of the political initiatives remains to be seen, there is increased hope for those Basques who wish to see a more independent state.

This article first presents information about the background of the Basque people and the origins of ETA. It then analyzes the various reasons for the weakening of ETA. Lastly, it explores the potential ramifications of ETA's political aspirations and the future of the Basque cause.

Different Communities

The Kingdom of Spain is a conglomeration of several states molded together through time and conquest and, today, is politically divided into nineteen "autonomous communities," districts which assume varying degrees of responsibility ranging from tax collection to education. As a result of this history, there exist several peoples within the political borders of this state, each with their own unique heritage, culture, language, and history. Among the many cultural minorities in Spain, three clearly predominate. The first two, the Catalans and the Galicians, reside along Spain's east coast and northwestern corner, respectively. The Basques make up the third predominant cultural entity and are, perhaps, the most culturally distinct of the three.

Basque Distinctions

Several types of evidence suggest that the Basques have lived relatively isolated in the northeastern corner of Spain for centuries. These people are culturally different from their Spanish neighbors on several levels: physically, linguistically, and historically. Physically, the Basque people are generally taller than the average Spaniard, with a more muscular appearance and distinctive facial characteristics. (Hooper, p. 387) As their antigen pattern (predominantly type A) and Rhesus count (Rh-) indicate that they are of a strong European and Westerly origin, serology also presents a good argument for the Basque people to have lived in their present

location throughout their history. (Hooper, pp. 386-87)

The Basque people are distinguished further by their language, *Euskara*. The language helps to give them a cultural identity and define them as a people, and is therefore of great importance and a significant source of their national pride. Today, several hundred thousand people speak the language in the Basque region, which extends from northeastern Spain into southwestern France.

Combining these distinctions with archaeological evidence leads Hooper, an expert in Spanish affairs, to suggest that the Basques ... might be direct descendants of Cro-Magnon man.... [T]he absence from Basque folklore of any sort of migration legend, when combined with the linguistic and serological evidence, would seem to suggest that the Basques have lived where they are now to be found since the Stone Age. (Hooper, pp. 387-88)

The Basques are further distinguished by their historical isolation and consider themselves to be unique and separate from the rest of Spain. A strong Basque desire for freedom and sovereignty, combined with their geographic isolation, has caused resistance to outside influence to become a hallmark of Basque history. (Hooper, p. 388) When the Moors ruled Spain for nearly 800 years (AD 718-1492), the Basques were one of the few unconquered peoples and thus were kept isolated from Muslim influence that had so great an impact on the culture of the surrounding regions. When Franco hoped to minimize the differences among the Spanish people and establish a stronger state by suppressing the country's various languages, cultures, and groups in the twentieth century, the Basques were one of the staunchest resisters to his efforts. *Euskara* was banned, intellectuals were imprisoned and tortured, and the Basque *fueros*² were revoked under Franco's "unification" effort. ("Who...")

²*Fueros* are historic provisions granted by the Spanish federal government that had allowed the Basques to enjoy a greater degree of autonomy than many of the other Spanish regions. Responsibilities such as tax collection and military conscription were allowed to be handled by the Basque government rather than controlled by the Spanish government.

This persecution of their freedoms, culture, and language only infuriated the Basque people. As a result, rather than bringing the unity he desired, Franco's cultural and political persecution resulted in the polar opposite — a cultural backlash and an explosion of ethnic pride.

It is worth noting that while Franco's actions may have led to the growth of Basque identity, the formation of Basque nationalism can be attributed almost entirely to Sabino de Arana Goiri (1865–1903). (Flynn, p. 105) In the latter part of the 1800s, Arana devoted himself to promoting Basque nationalism; not only was he responsible for organizing the Basque cause, but he also designed the national flag, wrote the national anthem, and revived *Euskara* and shaped it into the language it is today. With such an impact, it should come as no surprise that Arana's views formed the ideological basis for Basque nationalism. (Flynn, p. 105) Arana's views soon increased in popularity. By the end of the Spanish Civil War and the start of Franco's regime, the Basques had grown to see themselves as increasingly Basque and decreasingly Spanish. Franco's actions only hastened this identification, and within decades surveys of the Basque people reported that 60 percent of the population considered themselves as only Basque, while 24 percent felt a dual Basque-Spanish identity, and only 13 percent saw themselves primarily as Spanish. (Conversi, p. 160)

The Birth of ETA

True to the Basque hallmark of resistance and in conjunction with the growth of nationalism, a movement sprang up against Franco and the injustices against the Basque people. In 1959 a group of young activist students from the Spanish provinces of Vizcaya and Guipuzkoa became displeased with the apparent inaction of the leading political party (the moderate Basque National Party [PNV]). Organizing themselves to stand against Franco's dictatorship, this group formed the political party/nationalist group EGIN. EGIN soon took a more radical approach and within a few years evolved into ETA. ("Basque Homeland...")

Decades later, ETA still remains true to its dual purpose: to claim "an independent homeland for the Basque people in the Basque region," and to gain "self-determination in the form of a socialist Basque state." ("Terrorist Group...") It is important to note that the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, or *Euskadi*, in Spain is not considered by Basques, including ETA, to be the sole extent of the "Basque region." *Euskadi*, rather, is only part of the *Euskadi Herria*, "the Basque Homeland." ("Euskal...") According to the official Basque Country website, the *Euskadi Herria*, shown in Figure 1, is the true extent of

Figure 1
Map of Euskadi Herria



Source: Richburg.

Basque territory and consists of seven *herrialdes*, or districts, located at the western end of the Pyrenees on the Bay of Biscay (“Euskal...”). The three provinces of the Basque Country (Vizcaya, Alava, and Guipuzkoa) and the Autonomous Community of Navarre are both regions within the Kingdom of Spain, while the three departments of Labourd, Basse-Navarra, and Soule reside in southwestern France. (“Euskal...”)

Dictatorship to Democracy

The members of ETA have used force to try to accomplish their nationalist and socialist goals of independence and self-autonomy — force, that is, in the form of terrorism. Since its first strike in 1959 with a series of bombings and its first “premeditated political murder” (Conversi, p. 99) in 1968 of a secret police chief to the present day, ETA has continued its campaign of violence and terror. ETA has relied much on the use of bombings and political assassinations of leaders in the government, military, and judiciary to advance its agenda. (“Basque Homeland...”) Perhaps the most significant of these acts was the assassination of Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, Franco’s likely successor, in December 1973. This assassination, a retaliatory strike for the execution of Basque militants (“ETA: Key...”), aided Spain’s transition to democracy. (Kasmir, p. 96) The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) believes that his death “may have significantly hastened the end of Spanish fascism.” (“Basque Homeland...”)

While ETA originally organized to combat the abuses under Franco’s dictatorship, the group did not disband with the Spanish transition to democracy after his death in 1975. On the contrary, ETA’s work assumed a new fervor; 1980 was ETA’s deadliest year and resulted in 118 deaths. As Michel Wieviorka, a professor of sociology in France, notes, “As Spanish society made the transition to democracy, [ETA] became more violent and more separatist rather than less. Terrorism escalated just as democracy had indisputably established itself.” (Wieviorka, p. 292) Since its formation, ETA has been responsible for the deaths of more than 850 people and approximately 1,600 terrorist

attacks. (“U.S....”)

This rise in violence was not due to any failure by the Spanish government to include or represent Basque interests in the formation of the new government. In fact, the Basque Country gained a greater level of liberty with the transition to democracy, and the BBC reports that the Basques have a higher level of autonomy than any other Spanish region. (“Who...”) Passed on December 18, 1978, the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country granted broad powers to the Basque Country and served as the basis for Basque rights. These powers and rights include maintaining its own parliament and police force, running an education program (in which *Euskara* is promoted) (“Basque Homeland...”), and handling their own tax collection. (“Who...”) Nevertheless, ETA steadfastly continues to fight for full independence, regardless of risk or cost.

Weakening and Decline

Despite its determination, it has become apparent that ETA has been weakening. The structure of the organization has been taxed by ideological divisions and the loss of its leadership. Strong public support has been transformed to strong public opposition. The governments of Spain and many other countries have taken strong stances against the group, and its numbers have been dwindling. As a result of these contributing causes, the group has lost much of the strength and support it once wielded.³

Disorganization, Reduction, and Public Alienation

Two of the leading causes of ETA’s weakness spring from its internal conflicts and resulting disorganization. ETA was originally organized into five different “fronts” on which the ideals of the movement were to be carried out: the promotion of *Euskara*, education, political propaganda, legal action, and military action. However, a succession of internal con-

³Several of the points made in this section rely upon the work that *Washington Post* foreign correspondent Keith B. Richburg presented in his December 2003 article. (Richburg)

flicts over political and ideological disputes resulted in a series of divisions. Hooper states that after each of these divisions “the more violent, less intellectual group... survived intact.” (Hooper, p. 399) The remaining membership no longer has the capacity to engage efficiently on five fronts; today, membership primarily consists of what used to be the military wing of the organization.

What was once strong public support of ETA has transformed over time to strong public opposition. In the early years of the group’s formation, the public viewed ETA members as martyrs for their cause and demonstrated their support publicly. For instance, the 1968 killing of an ETA member by police brought about mass demonstrations in every city throughout the Basque Country, and priests held masses in the martyr’s memory for weeks afterward. Such popular uprisings encouraged large numbers of supporters to join in ETA’s work. (Conversi, p. 99)

Years later, the situation has changed greatly. Daniele Conversi, a senior lecturer at the University of Lincoln (U.K.) and an expert in nationalism, refers to a survey in 1982 of the Basque population. Fewer than fifteen years after the demonstrations mentioned above, 77 percent of the population were opposed to ETA’s activities and only 8 percent claimed to support the group. Subsequent surveys since 1982 show a continual decrease in ETA popularity, resulting largely from ETA’s “indiscriminate killings and purely terrorist acts which departed sharply from its original tactics.” (Conversi, p. 159)

One of the critical turning points in public opinion occurred in 1987. In the deadliest single attack the group has committed to the present time, a car bomb was set off in a parking garage beneath a Barcelona supermarket. Although ETA had phoned to warn of the blast, the civilians were unable to be evacuated in time; 21 people were killed. While the BBC quotes the group as apologizing for their “mistake” (“ETA: Key...”), ETA was not dissuaded from its quest. Instead, ETA has continued its attacks against military and political targets, including two high profile attempted assassinations in 1995 against both King Juan Carlos and Jose Maria Aznar, the former Prime Minister. (“ETA Violence...”)

A second critical turning point occurred a decade later. In July 1997 ETA kidnapped 29-year-old Miguel Angel Blanco, a councilor for the Popular Party (PP) in the Basque region, and demanded the release of 460 ETA prisoners as ransom. After the Spanish government refused to comply, Blanco was shot twice in the head and killed. (“Who...”) Public indignation over this murder far exceeded any previous grievance against ETA. People previously hesitant to speak out against ETA violence and oppression no longer feared for their lives as more than six million people across Spain demonstrated over a four-day period and demanded an end to ETA’s violence. For the first time, even several ETA supporters publicly condemned the murder. (“Who...”) This public mobilization allowed more open expression of displeasure with ETA; no longer did the people need to fear ETA in the way they once had.

As alluded to earlier, perhaps the most critical reason for the weakening of ETA’s public support is its extremist viewpoints. While many Basques support independence,⁴ other Basques are content with the extensive autonomy they currently have and accept that they are Spanish as well as Basque. (“The Basque ETA”) While the people may be divided about this issue, there is a strong majority of people in the Basque Country who are opposed to ETA’s use of violence (“ETA Violence...”), as clearly demonstrated in the protest over Blanco’s murder. The BBC further reports that ETA and its extremist followers are losing support because many believe that ETA is “desperately out of touch with public opinion.” (“Who...”) This extremism has alienated many of the Basque people, including members of the intelligentsia. Richburg quotes Andolin Eguzkitza, a professor of Basque culture in Bilbao: “You can’t kill people just because they disagree with you ...[and] [p]eople of goodwill are getting fed up....Today, many people who have been defending the work of ETA would say they have to stop.” (Richburg)

It is important to note that some public support for ETA does remain. In August 2000 thousands of people showed their support after

⁴Opinion polls suggest that diehard secessionists make up almost a quarter of the population. (“A House...”)

Table 1
ETA Attacks

Year	Deaths	Attacks/Bombings
2000	23	44
2001	15	43
2002	5	20
2003	3	17

Source: Richburg.

four ETA members were killed transporting explosives. (“ETA: Key...”) However, at the time of this writing, the organization’s strength appears to be fairly low. As Table 1 indicates, the number of attacks and murders committed by the group have also decreased dramatically. Annual results from 2003 show a reduction of over 60 percent in the number of attacks and over 85 percent in the number of deaths since 2000. The National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) Terrorism Knowledge Base estimates group strength to be only about 300 members. (“Terrorist Group...”) The ICT concurs, believing that ETA membership is “quite small, perhaps no more than 20 hard-core activists and several hundred supporters.” (“Basque Homeland...”)

Strong Spanish Political Stance under Aznar

The Spanish government has also taken a strong stance against the group and its violence, and its efforts have successfully hampered the group’s logistic, recruitment, and operational capabilities. (“Patterns...,” p. 54) In its 2004 “Patterns of Global Terrorism,” the U.S. State Department affirms that Spain has made “extensive progress” as it fights to eliminate ETA, carrying out many seizures of supplies and weapons and making numerous arrests. (“Patterns...,” p. 54) Richburg argues that although Spain has given the Basques a great degree of freedom, it refuses to grant independence. (Richburg) As long as ETA demands complete autonomy, it will be at odds with the Spanish government.

Former Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar’s hard-line policy toward ETA — “No negotiations, no concessions and unrelenting police pressure” (Richburg) — has brought much suc-

cess and has kept the group on the defensive. (Richburg) In a September 2004 speech at Georgetown University, Aznar acknowledged that “ETA itself is prostrated, but not finished.” (Aznar) A strong, determined fight against ETA requires clear identification of what ETA truly is, as he expounded upon in his speech.

Terrorism must be condemned in all circumstances. There are no good forms of terrorism. Many times I have read and heard in the U.S. media about ETA terrorists being described as “young rebels” and “pro-independence militants.” These individuals murder, kidnap, torture and bully free citizens in a democratic country. They are terrorists, and nothing more. To look with sympathy upon those who commit crimes thousands of miles away is immoral and detrimental.... Calling ETA a “separatist group”... would be like calling al-Qaeda “a spiritual organization.” Simply unacceptable. (Aznar)

However, regardless of their effectiveness in weakening the group, Aznar’s views and policies have not been without skeptics. Many in the Basque region believe his policies lacked a crucial component by failing to open political dialogue with moderate Basque nationalists, potential allies who run the government and who also reject violence. (Richburg) Yet, despite the strong criticism, Aznar has garnered international support for his stance against ETA, and his arrests, seizures, and efforts have greatly weakened it.

International Cooperation

Despite its modest roots, ETA has grown into an international organization, reported

to have members and underground supporters spread around the globe. ("Basque Homeland...") Of all its locations, the most crucial for ETA activity has been France. Not only is part of southern France part of *Euskadi Herria*, but also, being outside Spanish jurisdiction, it has served as a rear base and safe haven for ETA. (Frayse) However, with the international response to the events of September 11th and the increased governmental cooperation occurring within Europe, ETA has been forced to adapt its techniques and methods.

In 1997, the United States added ETA to its terrorism list (Richburg), and in 2001 the Spanish government achieved a significant diplomatic victory when, for the first time, all fifteen member governments of the EU designated ETA as a terrorist organization. ("ETA: Key...") This designation was critical to the success of the efforts against ETA, and many nations have aided in capturing and bringing ETA members to justice. Over the past several years, many arrests have been made, resulting in the imprisonment of nearly 700 ETA members in Spain and France. In 2003 alone, Spanish and French authorities arrested 171 ETA members and accomplices. Germany, the Netherlands, and several countries in Latin America have also helped to detain ETA members. ("Patterns...", p. 118) France's commitment to fight ETA, prompted by the EU's designation of it as a terrorist organization, has been a leading cause of this success. Whereas the French police had been previously slow in their efforts, French anti-terrorism police have put "severe pressure" (Richburg) on ETA members. (Richburg)

As mentioned previously, the loss of top leadership due to these arrests and actions has also been critical to ETA's weakening. While new leaders often quickly step in to replace the lost leaders, ETA has been devastated by its fluctuation in leadership and organization. (Woolls) Moreover, these new leaders, too, have been arrested as the international community fights against ETA.

The international effort has not solely been limited to arrests and seizures of weapons. Financial assets have been frozen by the U.S. and other nations in an attempt to cut the fund-

ing of ETA's operations. In May 2002 the U.S. Department of the Treasury froze the accounts of seven individuals accused of supporting ETA and also took action against the organization Askatasuna, which Paul O'Neill, the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, claimed was "an ETA front whose actions are controlled by ETA to complement and support ETA militants." ("U.S....")

IRA "Conversion" to Peace

The result of the signing of the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement in April 1998 also dealt a strong blow to the ETA cause. ETA has been known to have dealings with the Irish Republican Army (IRA); and its political wing, Batasuna, has been schooled on negotiation strategy by Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA. ("ETA: Key...") However, some believe that the connection runs much deeper. In a report presented to the U.S. Congress, experts believe that ETA "has often followed the IRA's lead in terms of tactics and operations." (Cronin, p. 21), while Richburg adds that the IRA can be viewed as ETA's ideological big brother. (Richburg) With the IRA observing a cease fire, reducing its arsenal, apologizing for killing civilians, and progressing through a peace process, ETA has become more concerned as to what its own future holds.

Following the IRA peace agreement, ETA announced a cease fire in September 1998, the first time the group has done so since its formation. While the fourteen-month respite was to allow for talks to begin between Batasuna and the Spanish government, ETA instead utilized the truce as a means to obtain more supplies and munitions. ("Basque Homeland...") According to the ICT, when the cease fire ended ETA blamed "the repressive measures taken by the Spanish government" and the "failure of mainstream Basque nationalists to work with it toward the creation of an independent Basque state." ("Basque Homeland...") In an official statement, ETA claimed, "The [peace] process is blocked and poisoned. Responding to a pledge to defend the Basque Country, the decision has been taken to reactivate the use of armed struggle." ("Basque Homeland...")

Politics

The international cooperation evident in ETA arrests and financial disruptions has also existed in Spanish dealings with Batasuna and has contributed to the further weakening of the group. Batasuna is to ETA what Sinn Féin has been for the Irish Republican Army. Formed in 1979, this nationalist-left party has had support fluctuating between five and ten percent from a Basque population of little more than two million. (Aulestia)

Batasuna denies ties to ETA (Tremlett), but the Spanish Interior Ministry argues to the contrary. The government maintains that Batasuna has “never condemned an attack, nor have they ever asked ETA to abandon its weapons.” (“ETA: Murder...”) According to the Interior Ministry, Batasuna has attended international forums and presented ETA as a separatist organization, discredited Spanish democracy, and complained of supposed oppression experienced under the Spanish state. (“ETA: Murder...”)

Acting on the connection between ETA and Batasuna, Aznar decided to take a stance against the political arm of ETA. Following a court case in August 2002, Judge Baltasar Garçon suspended the party for three years due to its connections with ETA, which he declared “guilty of crimes against humanity.” (“ETA: Key...”) Nine months later, Batasuna was permanently banned by the Spanish Supreme Court as a result of the party’s failure to condemn the acts carried out by ETA. This ban not only prohibits Batasuna members from serving on local and regional government positions, but also freezes the group’s funding. (“Patterns...,” p. 54) Again, other nations have supported the Spanish government, with the United States (May 2003) and the EU (June 2003) designating Batasuna a terrorist organization. This ban has caused a gradual yet progressive decrease in electoral votes (“ETA: Murder...”), thereby decreasing ETA’s political power.

Political Options

ETA’s weakening has provided opportunities for a new political deal between the Spanish government and the Basque people. (Richburg)

As Basque politicians — with the exception of Batasuna members — generally support ETA’s goals but not its methods (“Q&A...”), many people now believe that politics, rather than violence, is the means to achieving Basque independence.

One of the men leading this charge is Juan José Ibarretxe, the Lehendakari, or president, of the Basque Country. Elected by the Basque Parliament in July 2001, Ibarretxe has been an outspoken advocate of increasing Basque sovereignty. In a recent speech, Ibarretxe stated, “I want you to know that the Basque Country will never take part in a project of joint co-existence with the State, if it is not done of its own free will, because the Basque Country is not a subordinate part of Spain.” (Ibarretxe) However, Ibarretxe has also been unwavering in his condemnation of ETA and its tactics. As quoted by Richburg, Ibarretxe condemns the violence “totally and absolutely.... We have never defended our ideas with guns and we will never defend our ideas with guns.” (Richburg) He also argues that the true desire of the Basque people is to determine their own future and to be rid of ETA’s barbarity. (Font) Politics, instead, will replace violence in what Ibarretxe calls the beginning of the “post-ETA era.” (Ibarretxe, as quoted in “Ibarretxe Maintains...”)

Ibarretxe seeks to establish recognition and an international presence for the Basque people: politically, culturally, socially, and politically. At an international Basque gathering in October 1999, Ibarretxe stated in the opening speech:

[O]ur aim should be to move from the knowledge of a Basque reality in the world to gradual international recognition as a people. Recognition not only of our history and past characteristics. This is important, but it is insufficient. A recognition of what we are today: a country with its own identity. (“World...,” p. 23)

Despite these statements, Ibarretxe has maintained that he does not desire political independence for the Basque Country, but would only like to have freedom to be able to represent Basque interests in world affairs. This has led to the creation of the “Ibarretxe plan.” The plan, “Proposal for the Political Statute of the Community of the Basque Country,” was

passed October 25, 2003, by the Basque government on what Ibarretxe claimed as “a historic day for our people.” (“Institutional...”) As Ibarretxe continues in his speech:

This new Political Statute of the Basque Country represents...[a] commitment to provide a solution, a positive commitment, a commitment to an affirmative response, to a “yes” response. Yes to human rights and the freedom of all individuals. Yes to respecting the democratic rights of Basque society to decide their own future without violence. Yes to the social construction of a Basque Country for all Basque citizens, without exclusion.... We are fully convinced that a higher degree of self-government will also bring with it a higher level of well-being for each and every one of us...[and] a better life.... The new Statute does not propose a split but a new framework of coexistence with the Spanish State.... We ask only for the right to express ourselves. (“Institutional...”)

The plan calls, in short, for the Basque Country to have status as a freely-associated state, complete with its own foreign policy, separate courts, and even its own representation in the European Union.

However, the plan has met great resistance, especially from the Spanish government. As quoted by Richburg, Ibarretxe maintains that his plan “is not an independence plan...[nor] a plan to break up Spain, but a plan to coexist with Spain.” (Richburg) But Gustavo de Aristegui, a member of Spanish parliament and the majority leader on foreign policy, claims that the plan is “a back door to sovereignty.” (Richburg) Aznar responded to Ibarretxe’s plan by introducing legislation that would change the criminal code; with the change, a politician who calls for a referendum outside of his jurisdiction could be jailed — a change that would apply directly to Ibarretxe and his sovereignty plan. (Font)

With Zapatero’s election as Prime Minister of Spain, Ibarretxe has stated that he looks forward to working with the new leader. While he noted a “lack of communication” under Aznar’s Popular Party, Ibarretxe believes “the era of dialogue had been ushered in with Zapatero in power.” (“Ibarretxe Maintains...”) Ibarretxe also

feels that it is essential to have communication between the Lehendakari and the Prime Minister, despite their differing viewpoints. (“Ibarretxe Maintains....”)

Despite new opportunities arising to discuss these issues, consensus among the Basque people remains a more fundamental problem, one that will need to be worked out in the near future. Iñaki Galdós, the President of Eusko Alkartasuna (one of the leading political parties in the Basque Country), states, “The problem is that Basques do not agree on how to resolve the situation they live in.... [We have to find] a common diagnosis about the Basque conflict and about our identity, because so many different interpretations block the way forward.” (Galdós, as quoted by Font)

Moving Forward

The goal of the most recent international Basque meeting was *Aurrera Goaz*, Basque for “We go forward.” (Totonicagüena) With ETA violence in decline and a growing chance for a political solution, the opportunity to move toward a resolution to the question of Basque autonomy in northeastern Spain may be greater than it has ever been. The installation of a new Spanish government and communication between the Basque Country and Madrid provide hope that an end may be in sight. Provided that the government continues its strong policy towards ETA and its violence, there remains the potential for an end to the violence. Gorka Landaburu, a magazine editor and radio commentator, states: “Little by little, it’s the end of ETA.... ETA is arriving at the end of the road.... It’s the end of ETA, thanks to the pressure, thanks to the international cooperation.” (Landaburu, as quoted by Richburg)

In its efforts to bring about the end of ETA, the Spanish government must be careful not to alienate those Basque citizens who are willing and anxious to talk about their future. The leaders must take into account the Basque desire for independence. The Basque people must also realize that complete independence or autonomy may not be a feasible option, although sentiments for independence still remain strong. In time, a solution will be reached. The opening of communication between the two parties is only the first step.

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